REMARKS

The Office Action of May 18, 2005, has been carefully reviewed, and in view of the above amendments and the following remarks, reconsideration and allowance of the pending claims are respectfully requested.

In the above Office Action, claims 1, 3-13, 15 and 16 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Lynard et al.* (Patent No. WO 98/27904) in view of *Berg et al.* (U.S. Patent No. 4,685,909); claims 1, 3, 4, 6, and 9-13 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Mizutani* (U.S. Patent No. 5,613,960) in view of *Berg et al.* and claim 8 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over *Mizutani* in view of *Berg et al.* and further in view of *Allen, Jr. et al.* (U.S. Patent No. 5,522,810).

Claim 1 of the present invention recites "laminate bonding locations being disposed at least throughout a crotch area of the absorbent article so as to receive a major part of body liquid to be absorbed by the absorbent article." In contrast, *Lynard* discloses that "[T]he circular bonds 52 are arranged in a pattern that is preferably distributed over the entire body surface 20A of the sanitary napkin, with the exception of the ***unbonded window 54 in the liquid receiving zone*** of the sanitary napkin. The liquid receiving zone is the portion of the sanitary napkin that lies under the perineal area of the wear." Page 11, lines 29-33. Thus, the prior art upon which the Examiner relies for this feature, *Lynard*, specifically constructs the absorbent article so that the bonding locations are not in the crotch area, i.e, the perineal area, which is the region of the article that will receive most of the liquid. Accordingly, not only does the cited reference not disclose the recited feature -- it specifically teaches away from this limitation of claim 1.

The Examiner appears to read "the bonding locations being disposed in the exact center of the crotch area" into the recited limitation. Applicant contends that such interpretation is not accurate nor required in order to find claim 1 patentable over the cited reference. Rather, the claim limitation requiring the bonding locations to be disposed "at least throughout a crotch area of the absorbent article so as to receive a major part of body liquid to be absorbed by the absorbent article" is in itself in direct contradiction to the teaching of *Lynard* that there are no bonds in the liquid receiving zone, i.e., the portion of the sanitary napkin that lies under the perineal area of the wearer, and clearly the area which would receive a major part of body liquid to be absorbed.

Accordingly, applicant respectfully submits that the claim limitation of "... at least throughout a crotch area" is not met by the disclosure in *Lynard* of "...with the exception of the unbonded window 54 in the liquid receiving zone.." If the Examiner believes further amendments to the claim would help to clarify this significant distinction, Applicant would be pleased to consider the Examiner's suggestions for such wording.

Claim 1 further recites that the absorbent body includes a partially neutralized superabsorbent, which Applicant submits is also not suggested by the cited prior art.

The absorbent body of the primary reference, *Lynard,* includes a superabsorbent material. The absorbent body disclosed in the secondary reference, *Berg et al.*, contains both pH control agents and conventional superabsorbent material (highly neutralized hydrogel material). Such a pH control agent could be a partly neutralized polymer, but this is only an example among other examples such as citric acid, adipic acid, etc. Thus, one feature of the *Berg* absorbent body is the conventional superabsorbent polymer (neutralization grade preferably at least 65%)

and another feature is the pH control agent, upon which the Examiner lies for the recited feature of the claimed invention. Further, it is known from this reference that pH control agents lower the effect of absorption of hydrogel materials (column 2, lines 41-44). Still further, the absorbent body described in *Berg et al.* must contain **both** the control agent and the superabsorbent material (column 8, lines 36-41).

According to the present invention as claimed, a partly neutralized superabsorbent material is used in the absorbent body. In the Examples, it can be seen that only partially neutralized superabsorbents are used in the test products in order to achieve good absorption and to keep a low pH next to the skin of the wearer during use. This is achieved by the combination of the partly neutralized superabsorbent material and the material laminate according to the present claim 1, which gives a dry surface against the skin of the user. Further the applicant has found that a very good distribution of liquid has been accomplished and gel blocking is avoided in the absorbent body. This is the result of the lower absorption rate of the partially neutralized superabsorbents, which allows the liquid to be distributed throughout the absorbent body without being trapped by gel blocking. This gives an absorbent body with a good liquid distribution and utilization of the absorbent body.

When the skilled person reads *Berg et al.*, he will be lead to understand that a pH control agent used in an absorbent body has to be used **together with** a superabsorbent material, which is highly neutralized. It would not be obvious nor reasonable to think that the pH control agent could be used alone in an absorbent body for several reasons. One reason for this is that the pH control agent is not an absorbing material. Further, it lowers the absorption capacity. Another reason is that it has to be used together with a highly neutralized superabsorbing material.

The applicant has found that partly neutralized superabsorbents are good for the pH value and for the absorbing capacity. To say that it would be obvious for the skilled person to choose to use only a pH control agent in an absorbent body in combination with the material laminate according to the present invention based upon the disclosure in *Berg et al.* would clearly involve the impermissible use of hindsight knowledge of the present invention.

Accordingly, Applicant submits that claim 1 is not rendered obvious by the cited prior art.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above amendments and remarks, Applicant respectfully submits that the claims of the present application are now in condition for allowance, and an early indication of the same is earnestly solicited.

Should any questions arise in connection with this application or should the Examiner believe that a telephone conference would be helpful in resolving any remaining issues pertaining to this application; the Examiner is kindly invited to call the undersigned counsel for Applicant regarding the same.

Respectfully submitted,

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